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CIA seeks new strength in openness

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ANAHEIM — The CIA, spotlighted by the media since Watergate and Vietnam, is making its new openness a source of strength.

Adm. Stansfield Turner, CIA director - in - office, told a Town Hall of California luncheon audience at Disneyland Hotel Thursday that an environment of faith from the public could be promoted.

Turner, in the course of an exchange with Town Hall participants, also hit hard at Soviet warships in the Indian Ocean. He conceded that the USSR Navy is building up in an area from which half of U.S. oil imports are coming, Turner said. "They don't have legitimate interests there, yet they are there."

He said the Soviet military emphasis remained the CIA's No. 1 priority. "It always has been. And it is so now more than ever. The Soviet Union is basically agricultural. Yet it cannot feed itself because its basic economic theory is erroneous."

"They cannot compete with us in economics. So they turn to military build-up. We must be sure that we have adequate set-off, but not too much," he said.

In answer to another floor comment, which expressed concern regarding shipping computers and other advanced technology to the USSR, Turner said: "Our controls give us a reasonable safeguard against giving away too much."

Re-emphasizing the economic and political side rather than the military, Turner denied that withholding food from the Soviet Union would be effective. He said: "They have the right to buy at least 6 million tons of grain a year from the U.S. They still have bad harvest years, and when they do, they kill off their cattle."

"But it doesn't basically make them weak. They would simply pull the belt tighter in war."

Turner took time to explain why he, as incumbent CIA director, is in California, talking to civilians about intelligence matters.

"Five or six years ago, no CIA director would address you. But Vietnam and Watergate have propelled the CIA into the headlines. Former

agents have written books opening CIA secrets. The new CIA must operate in the open," he said.

Turner said there is now a Presidential Intelligence Overview Board — composed of Senators Albert Gore of Tennessee and William Scranton, Pennsylvania; and Thomas Farmer, Washington, D.C. lawyer. "They can be reached," Turner said, when there are complaints about the CIA.

There is also a congressional 'oversight process' in each chamber, dedicated only to intelligence, he said.

"They have me up there regularly. They're scrupulous. There is greater assurance than ever before about our intelligence activities."

"However, over-management lapses into actual direction even though we don't want to hobble intelligence. There are some things that must remain absolutely secret — such as the way the allies broke the German and Japanese codes in World War II and could not let on that we had."

"There was a time we could count on public cooperation to keep secrets. We used to have it on faith. People realized that for patriotic reasons, there were some things one did not talk about."

"We have not yet achieved a balance with the congressional committees. We need public support, but it may be another two years before we have the right balance."

"We are coming to terms with the situation. We are meeting the public more often. I speak at gatherings like this. We are removing vital secrets from our reports and releasing them. We are taking the 'top secret' and 'destroy before reading' labels off many reports; anyway our own people were losing respect for documents when too many were marked secret," Turner said.

He concluded that the CIA is becoming "sharper" for its accountability, and that the CIA is expanding its areas of expertise — learning of 150 other countries' economics, grain, medical, drug and terrorism conditions — in the CIA's non-military aspects. He said: "The U.S. is best in the world in intelligence today and I assure you that we are going to stay on top."